

Emotions in American History

EUROPEAN STUDIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

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Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation

American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century

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Emotions in American History

Edited by Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht

EMOTIONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

An International Assessment



Edited by

Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht



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*To Joseph F. Kett
who inspires his students
to always keep a sense of wonder*

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Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Gloucester, October 2008

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Introduction

EMOTIONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY



The View from Europe

Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht

EMOTIONS ARE HOT, in more than one way. Scholars of various branches have developed a passion for the study of emotions, and there is also a vibrant public debate on the constructive and destructive power of emotions in society as well as within each of us. In psychology, psychohistory, sociology, cognitive research, and the humanities, scholars have observed that modern research has focused too much on scientific and behaviorist models while there is little appreciation for culturally motivated reflection. The popular debate around emotional intelligence and emotional competence has challenged our belief in rationality and control as the pillars of human action; in today's popular and scientific understanding, emotions form the basis for actions, even or in particular when they are suppressed.

Most of the authors in this book are German historians or social scientists whose work concentrates on the history of the United States. Some of them labor in the vineyard of social history; others concentrate on US foreign relations. Some focus on colonial history while others address most recent political events. Some do not even regard themselves as historians but, instead, venture in neighboring fields, such as anthropology or psychology. Collectively, they have tested their respective findings with one question in mind: How do emotions play into the interactions, facts, and fictions pre-

sented in their respective stories and research fields? What is peculiar about emotions in America? How does the study of emotions change what we know about national and international history? And how do we as foreign scholars assess emotions in the United States?

* * *

Fifty years ago, in 1960, the psychologist Paul Ekman conducted several field studies, on the basis of which he argued that “when people are experiencing strong emotions, are not making any attempt to mask their expressions, the expression will be the same regardless of age, race culture, sex and education.”¹ In other words, Ekman postulated, emotions are basic forms of human experience: they include anger, hatred, jealousy, happiness, fear, and sadness, which were developed during the course of genetic evolution. Their sensation is universal. But their expressions and their social meanings differ vastly according to cultural constructions and social practices.²

Since then, the field has been in turmoil. In the past decades, psychologists and anthropologists have passionately debated the question whether emotions are universal or culturally conditioned. A great deal of anthropological work, in particular, has directly challenged the claim that even the biological sensation of emotions is universal.³ Adding to the confusion, scientists cannot agree on whether the principal variable in our assessment of emotions is the physiological existence or its cultural manifestation. A number of psychologists are convinced that cultural meanings do not have an impact on the development of emotional reactions. Many cultural anthropologists, in contrast, believe that emotions do not simply constitute part of the physiological system but attain their meaning through their expression and interpretation in social interactions. It is difficult to subscribe to either position completely. However, there is one place where the opinions of most psychologists and anthropologists concur: a study of the way in which emotions are being transmitted and communicated can possibly show us a tool to find out how to understand and define emotions proper.⁴

This is exactly what the historical study of emotions and emotional standards tries to do, and it is thus not surprising that it has come to constitute one of the most promising frontiers of social history. “Emotional history” rejects the notion that individual or collective human emotions represent static expressions independent of time and environment. Instead, it encourages scholars to interweave the analysis of emotions such as grief, anger, fear, hate, love, jealousy, and compassion in their specific historical and cultural contexts.

What does the history of emotions encompass? It traces emotional expressions throughout different periods of history; it examines the tension between impulses and socially accepted emotional standards; it analyzes the

impact of feelings and emotional change in the history of nationalism, immigration, war, law, politics, or social and economic transformations; and it not only enriches the study of gender, race, and class but also fosters interdisciplinary work by connecting historical research to related inquiries in sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

In recent years, the analysis of emotions, their expression, and their control have moved to the core of American historiography. Pioneering studies by Peter and Carol Stearns, Jan Lewis, and Karen Lystra have demonstrated how certain emotions seemed particularly troubling in a given social context: for example, Puritan society regarded the expression of anger and aggression as a sin.⁵ Likewise, other emotions have seemed increasingly desirable depending on the existing social norms, such as “coolness.” Peter Stearns and others have emphasized the traditional tension between social, legal, and political attempts to define what constituted accepted emotional standards while also looking at the resulting efforts to suppress some emotions while releasing others.

A number of historians have focused on individuals and social groups by looking at topics such as the changing face of the family, the relationships between individual family members, the transformation of anger over the course of history, the evolution of jealousy, or boredom as an emotional experience.⁶ Martina Kessel has shown how nineteenth-century German men and even more so women, by suppressing certain feelings like passion or anger in public, created a mask behind which they led a second (and often passionate) existence. As the century went by, however, both genders also increasingly feared to come across as “boring” if their emotionally reticent behavior went too far.⁷ Some social studies have explored tendencies to resist or reshape dominant emotional standards. A number of diplomatic historians have begun to focus on threat perception, friction, fear, and, recently, gender as a force in international relations: Frank Costigliola, for example, has examined the impact of emotions on American foreign policy.⁸ In a gesture to current debates in psychology and anthropology, some scholars have drawn intercultural and international comparisons, focusing on behavioral standards and interpretative differences. And again others have asked what exactly constitutes the language and expression of emotions.⁹

These studies transform our understanding of transitional periods in American history. They correlate the analysis of emotional change at the beginnings of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to social, economic, and structural changes in the United States such as the emergence of a democratic form of government and an egalitarian social ethos, the market revolution, the creation of American middle class, the civil rights movement, the spread of urbanization and industrialization, and the development of a consumer economy with its attendant ethos.

In this book, a dozen scholars, most of whom come from Europe, combine their expertise to offer a transnational look on the study of emotions in the United States. The book analyzes the role of emotions in the study of American history between the eighteenth century and the present. The contributors look at emotions in war, emotions in the social and political discourse, and emotions in art and the media. They specifically seek to address the role of emotions in the context of imperialism, racism, patriotism, modern anti-war demonstrations; aesthetics, international relations, and public opinion; death sentences, sexual norms, and presidential election campaigns. Complementing nine case studies with three interdisciplinary essays, a social historian, an anthropologist and a psychologist critically review the approaches to the study of emotions in history, outline both promises and pitfalls in the field, and offer new insights regarding future research projects.

This book is thus designed as both an introduction to some of the most recent trends in the field and as an invitation to consider American history from an outside perspective. In this particular case, it is not merely the research or the sources as such, but the perspective of the researcher that seeks to shed transnational light on our understanding of emotional history. In this it merges seamlessly with some of the most dynamic and recent trends in the field, notably the effort to frame the history of the United States in an international perspective.¹⁰

* * *

Emotions in American History is subdivided into five parts, the first and last theoretical, the other three related to case studies: emotions in war, public opinion, and sociopolitical debates.

The first section looks at theoretical, historical, and psychological approaches to the study of emotions. In the first chapter, Peter Stearns calls attention to the emergence of the history of emotions in relation to social, cultural, and family history, but also to the growing array of research on emotion in several disciplines. Historians can focus on connections among emotional standards—themselves important in policy and behaviors; the ways people evaluate their own and others' emotions; and actual emotional experience. Key issues in advancing this field include appropriate interdisciplinary formulations, attention to social class variables, comparative analysis, and evaluation of the results of changes and continuities in emotional standards. Emotions history enriches our understanding of the past, but can also be used to provide vantage points on current issues and behaviors that result from recent trends such as "informalization" or the growing capacities of contemporary media to play on fears.

Alfred Lüdtkke assesses the emotional approach from an anthropological point of view and asks how historians trace and interpret emotions in

people's everyday lives. This chapter discusses approaches for reconstructing people's feelings in their daily practices. More concretely, the focus is on the emotional dimension of a pivotal figure of "modern times," the worker in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, the German case reveals industrial workers' disgust and tedium but also considerable joy at work and pride about producing "quality." The author gives special attention to feelings about work that directly contributed to warfare such as the German war effort after 1939. Lüdtke detects a seamless connection of production and destruction in peoples' feelings about their work: they stimulated acceptance of and cooperation with Nazi goals and policies.

The second section of this book focuses on the area that has recently emerged as one of the most prominent fields in this area: emotions and war. Fabian Hilfrich's essay focuses on the emotion of fear in anti-imperialist rhetoric after the Spanish-American War of 1898. More specifically, it analyzes the argument that imperialism would incite popular passions, thus undermining civic virtue and—by extension—democratic self-government in the United States. As insulting as the argument was to "the people," it is more adequately read as a representation of anti-imperialist emotions—the emotions of an elite group fearful of the "common people." The article demonstrates the potential of research into the role of emotions in foreign policy analysis, providing insights that would otherwise only be gained by sociological analysis and demonstrating how emotions themselves are not only time- but also class-bound.

Jörg Nagler looks at the role of emotions in the context of wartime mobilization during World War I. He is specifically interested in the campaign against German-Americans on the home front and the link between propaganda and emotions. In his essay, he argues that during the war the United States was in a "search for order" and identity, an identity that would entail the nation's new role in world politics. This dual task highlighted the highly emotional nationalist ardor and the inevitably disruptive social and psychological forces that always accompany nationalism supported by propaganda in times of war. To Nagler, all attempts to explain the eruption of violence on the home front must be placed in the context of the mobilization of emotions—with fear as its central component—of the government.

In the last essay of this section, Andreas Etges shows that despite a general sense of reconciliation regarding the Vietnam War on the national level, Jane Fonda remains a focus of hate for many American veterans. Exploring why Fonda ("Hanoi Jane") still triggers violent expressions of emotions among many veterans long after the war, the essay examines her political emergence in the late 1960s, her brief visit to North Vietnam in July 1972, and the ensuing public controversy as well as the changing veterans' relationship with Fonda until today. The actress became a central symbol of

the veterans' general feeling of betrayal. For them Fonda betrayed not only America, but also her sex. Instead of playing the female role of nurse or healer, she sided with the enemy and figuratively killed some of her own countrymen. "She was the pinup who went AWOL," J. Hoberman wrote.

The third section turns to the link between emotions and public opinion. Bettina Friedl examines public reactions to artworks. She argues that in literature, emotions can be described. These descriptions can explain a character's emotional state of mind, illustrate the emotional impact of an event, or even portray a collective mood; they can, moreover, generate an emotional response in the reader. In the visual arts, emotions cannot easily be spelled out unless the theme or title of a work of art refers specifically to a narrative. They are, instead, suggested, either through a person's expression or through the evocation of an emotionally charged event or a mood prevalent at a certain time. Because emotions in painting are culturally determined, they are often difficult to trace. While many American painters of the nineteenth century rejected the anecdotal or the overtly narrative, they did refer to familiar narratives—such as the Bible or national history—or to a common iconography in order to elicit certain emotions. Despite their different approaches, painters such as Edward Hicks and Frederick Edwin Church could refer to cultural traditions that allowed viewers to participate in the emotions their paintings expressed. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, collective emotions were increasingly replaced by private emotions that are more difficult to decipher. Thomas Eakins's late portraits present such contemplative and introspective images that refuse any translation into a traditional language of emotions.

Stephanie Schneider's essay retraces the potential of political cartoons as historical sources for the analysis of emotions and emotional standards in international relations, in particular that of Anglo-American relations in the nineteenth century. It focuses on the way cartoons address emotions. Specifically, Schneider looks at the tools used in cartoons to appeal to the emotion of the viewer and the way in which representations of emotions in cartoons can be analyzed for the study of the symbolic representation of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American relationship.

Adelheid von Saldern considers the emotions involved in the comparisons between the United States and Europe through an analysis of American perceptions of European anti-Americanism published in US magazines during the 1920s. As the interpretation of other countries involves and demands reference to one's own country, the analysis also encompasses the reconstruction of debates over American identity in the 1920 and thus contributes to the growing historiography of interwar political culture in the United States. As shown, *qualitative magazines* interpreted European anti-Americanism as extremely emotional. American answers avoided anti-European emotions.

Instead, contributors drafted their articles as unemotional statements designed to reveal their nation's superiority based on evolution, history, wealth, and mission.

The fourth section considers the role of emotions in social and political debates. Jürgen Martschukat's essay traces the history of capital punishment in the New Republic as an history of emotions. It concentrates on the contemporary observation, description, and definition of the emotional spectator at executions. It indicates in its first part how the emotional spectator was shaped in discourses of medicine, philosophy, and law from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The second part analyzes how the figure of the emotional spectator contributed to the reevaluation of public punishments since the late eighteenth century. The final part specifies how the definition of emotions and their supposed effects significantly influenced the shaping of the political, social, and cultural landscape of the Early Republic.

Michael Hochgeschwender's essay turns to religion, raising some methodological issues about the usefulness of Foucault's discourse analysis in the context of the debate on sexuality, religion, and emotions: how is it possible to explain the hegemonic shift between rivaling discourses? The author proposes to try to solve this methodological and logical problem by generally reintroducing causal principles into discourse analysis in a twofold manner: according to him, it is necessary to combine discursive analysis with elements of a structural, socioeconomic analysis of modes of production that may serve as general principles of change. Moreover, he finds it also necessary to reintroduce the experiences of individual, free-willed actors who serve as agents of specific change since only personal agents can make a choice between rivaling discourses. This combination of a text-oriented, modified, structural interpretation and a history of individual agents and their specific experiences represent a dynamic concept for further research in the field of gender studies. The history of emotions and the history of experiences, he argues, enable a more synthetic interpretation of discursive shifts and rivaling discourses.

The section ends with an excursion into the contemporary political landscape. Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson argues that the history of emotions provides important clues to understanding human behavior and can provide a tool in our effort to understand wider political, social, and economic trends in American history. She believes that this applies in particular to the history of African Americans, racial conflicts in general, and the black struggle for freedom and equality in particular. In this context, emotions repeatedly stir(red) public emotions in the United States to a degree hardly ever reached by other domestic issues. Looking at race relations and election campaigns between 1865 and 2007, she argues that the question of whether

black people have a right to full inclusion in American society touches fundamental issues of American self-identity and national purpose and has thus always polarized American society.

In line with the interdisciplinary approach, at the end of the volume we turn to a psychologist to ask for his judgment of our collective efforts to study the history of emotions in America. In response, Horst Gundlach examines the way the science of psychology has dealt with the topic of emotion since the introduction of experimental methods in psychological research. He relates some of the major points of dissent and elucidates why psychologists have not yet reached a consensus on how to define emotion. Following a look at the themes the history of emotions has dealt with, he suggests that social psychology might be a more promising partner for historians of emotions than the psychology of emotion, which is traditionally regarded as a branch of general psychology. Now the floor is open for discussion.

* * *

What, then, do emotions in American history look like when viewed from Europe? These essays cover a wide and diverse ground, as diverse as the history—and perhaps the minds—of the American people. Considering Peter Stearns' recommendation to remain aware of geographical and national differences, it is inviting to ponder the question whether emotions in the United States look different to foreigners (including foreign researchers) than to Americans and US researchers.

Traditionally, theories of emotions in Europe stressed physical expression such as laughing or crying as consequential expressions of emotions.¹¹ In the United States, the pragmatic perspective contrasts with this more essentialist European approach. The American philosopher and psychologist William James, for one, postulated that the soul followed the physical expression: people do not cry because they are sad; they are sad because they cry. Where James believed that we first react to a situation, before we experience the emotion, his German colleague, the much acclaimed Wilhelm Wundt, insisted that the emotion comes first, followed by physiological and behavioral consequences: people cry because they are sad.¹² We do not need to be concerned with the validity of either Wundt's or James's claim. Instead, their psychological research reminds us of the fundamental challenge posed by pragmatism to European scholarship and the competition between cause and effect: do emotions inspire expressions or do expressions inspire emotions?

To speak about a typically "American emotion" would therefore be overstretching the point. But as our case studies show, there is, indeed, a specific cultural way to express, accept, and standardize emotions, at certain moments in time, in the United States—and elsewhere. Collectively, the au-

thors in this volume believe that emotions in American history are peculiar in that they have been inspired, shaped, digested, expressed, and analyzed through specific historical events and cycles unique in the history of the United States. Ekman may be right and emotions may be universal. But their expression and experience is not. We ask the reader to keep this differentiation well in mind when reading the ensuing essays.

Notes

Thank you, Heiko Hecht, for reading and commenting on this essay with the keen and critical eye of an experimental psychologist.

1. Cited in Antony S. R. Manstead and Agneta H. Fischer, "Beyond the Universality-Specificity Dichotomy," *Cognition and Emotion* 16, no. 1 (2002): 1; for a debate on the state of the art, see 1–9.
2. Paul Ekman, *The Face of Man: Expressions of Universal Emotions in a New Guinea Village* (New York: Garland STPM Press, 1980); Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davison, *The Nature of Emotions: Fundamental Questions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Paul Ekman and Klaus Scherrer, eds., *Approaches to Emotion* (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1984); Amelie v. Griessenbeck, *Kulturfaktor Emotion: Zur Bedeutung von Emotion für das Verhältnis von Individuum, Gesellschaft und Kultur* (München: Akademischer Verlag, 1997); Horst Gundlach, *Reiz: Zur Verwendung eines Begriffes in der Psychologie* (Bern: H. Huber, 1976); Gary B. Palmer and Debra J. Occhi, eds., *Languages of Sentiment: Cultural Constructions of Emotional Substrates* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1999); Klaus Scherrer, *Psychologie der Emotion* (Göttingen: Verlag für Psychologie, 1990); Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1999); Heinz-Gunter Vester, *Emotion, Gesellschaft und Kultur: Grundzüge einer soziologischen Theorie der Emotionen* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991).
3. Manstead and Fischer, "Beyond the Universality-Specificity Dichotomy," 1. See also the special issue of *Cognition and Emotion* 16, no. 1(2002).
4. Kenneth J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
5. Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (October 1985): 813–36; Fabian Hilfrich, "Manliness and 'Realism': The Use of Gendered Tropes in the Debates on the Philippine-American and on the Vietnam War," in *Culture and International History*, ed. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 60–78.
6. For an excellent survey, see Peter Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
7. Martina Kessel, "Das Trauma der Affektkontrolle: Zur Sehnsucht nach Gefühlen im 19. Jahrhundert," in *Emotionalität: Zur Geschichte der Gefühle*, ed. Claudia Benthien, Anne Fleig, and Ingrid Kasten (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 156–77; see also Benthien et al., "Ein-

- leitung," *ibid.*, 7–20; Anne-Charlotte Trepp, "Emotion und bürgerliche Sinnstiftung oder die Metaphysik des Gefühls: Liebe am Beginn des bürgerlichen Zeitalters," *Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel: Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 23–56.
8. Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *The Journal of American History* (March 1997): 1309–39; Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).
 9. Stearns and Lewis, *Emotional History*; Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, "Trumpeting Down the Walls of Jericho: The Politics of Art, Music and Emotion in German-American Relations, 1870–1920," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 3 (spring 2003): 585–613.
 10. See, for example, the various contributions in the Berghahn Books series, "Explorations in Culture and International History."
 11. Arthur L. Blumenthal, "A Wundt Primer: The Operating Characteristics of Consciousness," in *Wilhelm Wundt in History: The Making of a Scientific Psychology*, ed. Robert W. Rieber and David K. Robinson (New York: Academic Publishing, 2001).
 12. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt, 1890), see particularly the chapter "Emotion."

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APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF HUMAN EMOTIONS

Chapter 1

EMOTIONS HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES



Goals, Methods, and Promise

Peter N. Stearns

EMOTIONS HISTORY is a relatively new field, filled with promise but also generating a variety of questions. These questions include: how can emotions history be done, and what's the point of doing it? This essay addresses these issues, while acknowledging the many gaps to be filled and the many unforeseen directions that the field may take in future. Enough research is being done now on emotions history to make it clear that scholars will interpret the category in various ways. I wish mainly to suggest some criteria to consider amid the variety.

I will argue that there are important signs of rising momentum for emotions history, both in Europe and the United States, despite its still-hesitant beginnings. I will argue, further, that not only can emotions history be done, with enlightening results, but that it serves as a fulcrum between individual experience on the one hand, and larger historical developments on the other. Understanding the history of emotions can assist in exploring emotions themselves, in figuring out how human beings function by exploring changes and continuities in emotional experience over time. But emotions history also explores factors that help explain larger developments, for example in law, or politics, or consumer behavior. Emotions and emotional standards

here serve as causes that need to be added to the more conventional factors historians use to explain some key changes in society at large.

The dominant focus of American work on emotion involves analysis of change, with the usual accompanying apparatus exploring concomitant continuities and relevant causation. Important examples of this approach include John Demos's evaluation of a crucial shift from shame to guilt in both private life and public punishment, between the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries; or Susan Matt's treatment of the evolution of attitudes toward envy, from disapproval to approval, as part of the emergence of a new level of consumerism in the early twentieth century. Sensitive considerations recognize distinctions and relationships between shifts in emotional standards on the one hand, important in their own right, and the undoubtedly more complicated possibility of actual changes in emotional experience. In between are changes in public responses to emotion, which will show up, for example, in legal formulations or school regulations.¹

While innovative historians called for research on emotions in the 1930s, with Lucien Febvre, the charge was explicitly taken up only in the 1980s. In the United States, emotions history responded in part to growing interest in sociology and anthropology, two other disciplines that examine the cultural components of emotional experience, but even more to findings in gender and family history. This differed to some extent from work in Europe that had a fuller theoretical base, often around Elias's idea of a civilizing process, and more connection to public and even political developments. My own work, in the American mode, was first spurred by findings in family history by Demos, Stone, and others, which argued for a great increase in family emotionality in the eighteenth century without, however, examining this strand very precisely.² It was also spurred by my work on masculinity, examining characteristic claims that men were held to "unemotional" standards when masculine norms clearly called for emotions like anger in certain circumstances. Explicit research on emotions seemed necessary to answer significant historical questions or provide greater clarity, particularly in exploring changes in gender standards and family life. Early focus thus involved particular attention to aspects of love, personal grief, and anger when enmeshed in private life.

It is vital to note that psychohistory, moderately popular in the United States and based primarily on Freudian models, has contributed to American emotions research only slightly. Dominant psychohistorical research focuses on individuals, not wider emotional patterns, and while efforts to extend to wider groups (for example, to generations) have been provocative, they have not been entirely persuasive. The marked decline of Freudian models in other disciplines involved in emotions research also complicates this approach.

Research in emotions history in the United States has already blossomed to include a variety of topics and periods. It is possible to explore change and continuity in such emotions as grief, anger, fear, guilt, shame, love of various sorts, jealousy, and envy—an incomplete list, to be sure, but a promising one. There have also been discussions of broader emotional style, cutting across specific emotions. This same growing body of work variously explains what causes change in emotional standards, with components ranging from new religious currents, new types of expertise (such as the rise of psychology), new economic arrangements such as corporate management structures that call for new emotional formulations, and even changes in health concerns. And of course the research looks to the consequences of emotional change, in areas extending from friendship to consumer behavior.³

A great deal of work has focused on two periods of significant change. One embraces the late eighteenth–early nineteenth centuries, when emotional redefinitions involved shifting gender norms, a rise in the approval and expectation of love in courtship, and (especially for women) a general increase in sensibility, along with (as John Demos has argued) an important shift from shame to guilt both in childrearing and in public punishments.

The second transition period involves the second quarter of the twentieth century, with a general movement to reduce emotional intensity, but also to make some of the nineteenth-century rules less formal. Gender prescriptions—for example, that respectable women not get angry, or that men and women strive for an intense but ethereal love—eased. Analysis of this period is complicated by a folk wisdom (replicated in some earlier sociology) that argued that the only trend was toward greater permissiveness, “letting it all hang out,” which is very misleading. It is complicated also by the fact that in the same period, many media and sports performances highlighted more intense emotions—which meant that Americans began to combine considerable regulation of emotion in daily life with the capacity, as spectators, to watch displays of deep anger or fear. Discussions of American character, heating up in the late twentieth century, complete with claims of declining standards of self-control, increase the challenge for research on the actual evolution of twentieth-century emotional styles: what many Americans think is happening to emotion, on average, differs from recent historical reality. But, among relevant scholars, despite variations in specific formulations, the focus on increasing efforts to discipline emotional intensity provides a widely accepted framework.

Rather than further summarize a rich and available literature, I want to turn to five challenges to the ongoing effort that will further explain what emotions history is all about, and where it is heading, at least in the United States. Of course we must hope for an acceleration of the research effort overall and a commitment to cover a wider array of relevant topics,

to uncover additional sources—the standard prerequisites for a successful historical subfield. But there are some guidelines peculiar to the emotions history field as well. The first three points in this category can be captured fairly quickly, while the final two deserve fuller comment in getting to the essence of how emotions history can be done and what purpose it serves in linking the private and public faces of past experience.

Issue #1: Interdisciplinary Connections

Historians of emotion can benefit greatly—indeed, have already benefited greatly—from contact with kindred disciplines. Work by sociologists and anthropologists sometimes has a historical dimension of its own, though the commitment to explore change is less systematic. Certainly there is a shared interest in exploring how particular cultural contexts shape emotions in various ways. Anthropological findings on emotional variance in different cultures are directly relevant to historical work.⁴ With psychology, the dominant current discipline where emotions research is concerned, the relationship is more complex. A minority school of “constructivists” or discursive psychologists easily joins historians in exploring comparisons of emotional cultures in different places or different times. But mainstream psychology is interested in definitions of emotion that suggest less connection to history. Those aspects of emotion that are neural or chemical reflexes are not really open to historical inquiry—though they may have historical consequences in spurring individual behavior. Emotional responses like the startle reflex or flushing are differently valued by different cultures (blushing is far less popular now than it was for nineteenth-century women), and this does enter the historical arena, but the experiences may not change significantly. But emotions that have a larger cognitive or volitional element, like grief or love, obviously are affected by cultural valuations and expectations, and here is where a historian can link with psychologists in trying to figure out what emotions are all about.

Historians have every reason to participate in, profit from, and contribute to the growing interest in emotions research in several disciplines. Active connection with other disciplines will in turn help keep historical work on emotions honest, by avoiding unduly vague or loose references to what emotions are. References to “fear” in a particular time, for example, should be conditioned by some knowledge of what other disciplinary findings about fear are—how other disciplines define it in terms of individual and collective emotional experience. Historical work does not have to accept all the strictures of psychology, for some claims go too far toward the purely reflex end. Psychologists who seek to define emotion as a very brief

process really miss the mark, given what we know about human capacity to anticipate, mull over, savor, and even recall emotions—which is where cultural conditioning particularly enters in. There is every reason, further, to keep working to make psychologists understand better the cultural component and the extent to which changes in emotion may help clarify actual human experience, including periodic requests for therapeutic help because of confusions over what this or that emotion is “supposed” to be. But historians do need to keep track of psychological work as well, as a spur to appropriate precision and as a reminder of the reflex component that emotions do contain.

We actually have some experience in the kind of oversimplification that contact with other relevant disciplines can help avoid. When family historians first started writing about emotional change, they frequently depicted a stark contrast between emotionless premodern families and their emotion-charged modern counterparts. This was simply wrong, in ignoring some standard or “natural” emotional propensities. Change did occur, and it was significant, but it involved the meaning, intensity, and acceptability of familial emotion, rather than the quantum leap that had first been claimed.

Issue #2: Diversity

Americans who work on emotions thus far have focused mainly on white, Protestant, middle-class formulations. This culture dominates the most widely sold sermons and childrearing tracts, and it has had wide influence. But there are other emotional subcultures operating in American history, and they deserve attention directly as well as in their relationship to the mainstream standards. We know that different ethnic groups maintain different standards of grief and mourning, for example. What happens to these standards when they interact with the growing hostility to grief in mainstream settings in the twentieth century? By the 1950s, African Americans were demanding increased emphasis on the importance of emotional assertiveness, as part of the civil rights movement. But this was precisely the time when mainstream culture stressed heightened control over anger, especially at work. Here, along with outright racism, is one reason for the employment difficulties of black males, especially in the service sector.

Attention to subcultures must involve religion as well as race and ethnicity. Philip Greven has shown the ongoing importance of the distinctive, tense emotional culture of the Evangelical tradition.⁵ Recent work shows also how Catholics, while influenced by mainstream standards—for example, concerning invocations of fear—responded with their own formulations and with distinctive timing for change. Exploring the experiences and con-